

Message from the President of the Jamaican-Canadian Association



This special souvenir book has been published as a Silver Anniversary project of the Jamaican-Canadian Association. Happily, this coincides with Jamaica's 25th anniversary of Independence which was gained on August 6, 1962 and which is celebrated the first Monday of August. This is the JCA's salute on behalf of Jamaicans all over Canada, to the land that gave us birth. We have chosen to make Canada our home and as this book testifies, many of us having become Canadians, have not restricted our involvement in Canada to the receipt of a certificate of citizenship, but have brought to it the vast richness of the Jamaican culture, reaching out as trailblazers and role models and excelling in almost every field of endeavour.

In this regard I hasten to add that the profiles presented in this book represent but a small slice of the wide panorama of achievement and contribution of our people. In its own way, too, this publication is meant to be a tribute to all the Jamaican associations from Halifax to Vancouver which have done so much over the years, not only

for the approximately 400,000 people of Jamaican origin here, but also for their neighbours and their communities. On behalf of the presidents and leaders of all the Jamaican associations in Canada, I take great pleasure in presenting this souvenir book as a reference point and a testament.

In so doing, I thank and congratulate all those whose work and dedication made the book possible: the researchers, writers, editors, achievers, administrators, designers, photographers and members of the selection committee. In particular, I acknowledge the contributions of Karl Fuller, D.K. Gordon, Joan Grant, Grace Baugh, Jean Forde, Maureen Brown, Gillian Recas and Ewart Walters who have all performed at a very high level of dedication and expertise. Finally, I thank the Secretary of State, Multiculturalism Sector for their assistance in the production of this book.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "Roy Williams". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Roy Williams

(1850-64) against the Manchu dynasty and the failure of the rebellion made emigration from China and settlement overseas very attractive to them. The majority went to the United States and Central America where they were employed building railroads. In 1854 the first group of 472 indentured Chinese arrived in Jamaica from Panama where they were building the railroad from Panama City to Colon.

Already exhausted from overwork, most were declared unfit for the cane fields and admitted to hospitals in Kingston and Spanish Town. Only a few survived. Chinese recruitment continued from 1864-1870 when it tapered off as planters preferred East Indians who were inclined to remain on the estates after their contracts expired. Indian indentured servants were brought to the island in 1848 and this immigration continued until 1917 when Indian nationalists were successful in bringing it to an end.

Indentured servants usually served three to five years and wages were set at a shilling a day. Rations were dictated by government regulations and they were housed in barracks with medical and hospital care free of cost. To prevent abuse a Department of Immigration was established with an Agent-General in charge and sub-agents posted in the countryside to supervise the estates. A condition of indentured labour was a return passage to their homeland at the end of the term but most Indians and Chinese chose to remain.

Jamaica required far fewer indentured Indians than Trinidad and Guyana which were virtually underpopulated. They make up a small minority of Jamaica's population and they have been slow to move away from the life they have known on the sugar and banana estates and merge with the mainstream. The Chinese on the other hand left as soon as their term was served

and most set themselves up as grocers. They soon dominated the grocery trade and expanded into the food and beverage industry and later into real estate. The younger generation has tended to move into the professions, particularly medicine and dentistry.

The Sephardic Jews are one of the oldest Jewish communities in the New World (as is the Jewish temple in Kingston). They came from Spain and Portugal as part of the Spanish settlement which began that morning in 1494 when Jamaica's native Arawak Indians awoke to find Christopher Columbus wading ashore. Fleeing the Spanish Inquisition they remained in Jamaica after the Spanish settlers, discovering Jamaica had no gold, abandoned it to the Columbus family and went off to neighbouring Cuba. In the 19th century a second Jewish community was established with the arrival of the English and German Jews. The Jewish presence is identifiable in the fields of commerce, manufacturing and law.

The Lebanese Christians are the last group to make their appearance in Jamaican society. They arrived at the turn of this century at a time when the Jews were turning from trade to the professions so they did not have to compete for a role. Most started as itinerant merchants with a mule and bales of cloth making rounds to the small villages and outlying districts. These humble beginnings allowed them to accumulate enough capital to own stores. Within a short period they controlled the dry goods business. They recognized Jamaica's potential for tourism and as investors and entrepreneurs helped to develop this industry which has become the island's largest source of foreign exchange. The present Prime Minister, Edward Seaga, is the most prominent son of this community.

After its capture by the British, Jamaica was the largest of their Caribbean possessions and they were quick to establish the plantation system which had proven lucrative in Barbados. Becoming a West Indian planter was a lifestyle open only to those of means. Purchase of a property, labour force, equipment and supplies, and hiring white managers and tradesmen required a large outlay of capital. English gentlemen knew well their rights and privileges at home and were not about to relinquish them in the colonies. In order to encourage planters to emigrate to Jamaica, Charles II appointed Lord Windsor as Governor of the island in 1661 with instructions to set up a council to arrange for the election of an Assembly as in other English territories. He was to appoint justices and pass laws for the good of the colony "provided they be not repugnant to our laws of England."

It is this class which established and maintained English institutions and the rule of law on the island. It is to their credit that often they agreed to laws which diminished their power and control and shared their rights and privileges with the other races and classes. The educational system was modelled on the British system. It was set up by the planters to avoid sending their children to England for schooling. Up to the time of independence in 1962, English teachers were still being brought out in large numbers on contract.

Jamaica's multi-racial society developed in response to the demand for capital and labour to develop the island's resources and as each group made its appearance, laws were passed to acknowledge their presence and the position they occupied in society. As social roles changed, laws kept pace. This legal identification of race and rights has contributed greatly to the racial harmony. No one group

feels threatened by the others. Poor Irish and poor Germans still live as farmers and fishermen and essentially have the same lifestyle as rural Blacks. Other classes also represent the melange of races and colours, all equal before the law.

Why did we come to Canada?

The migration process has been spurred over the years by war, when many came to join the Canadian Armed Forces, by employment opportunities, especially through the government-to-government domestic scheme of the mid 1950's, by the quest for further study and, overwhelmingly, by the universal Jamaican objective of bettering themselves. From the 1930's McGill University and later Sir. George Williams University, were prime destinations for Jamaicans seeking further study. Many of these students are in Canada today, some of them having returned to Jamaica to contribute to the land of their birth before returning to Canada. Jamaicans have come to Canada from a country where education has been the most potent force for upward mobility. Whatever the socio-economic status, Jamaicans have brought with them a strong commitment to education. As such, Jamaicans represent one of the best qualified groups of immigrants to Canada and have made significant and lasting contributions to Canadian society. We have come with a vast wealth of history and culture supporting us. Prominent in our occupations and versatile in our abilities and contributions, Jamaicans are possessed of a clear and undiluted understanding of social justice and an undying commitment to excellence.